

Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative: The NEA Foundation at the Forefront

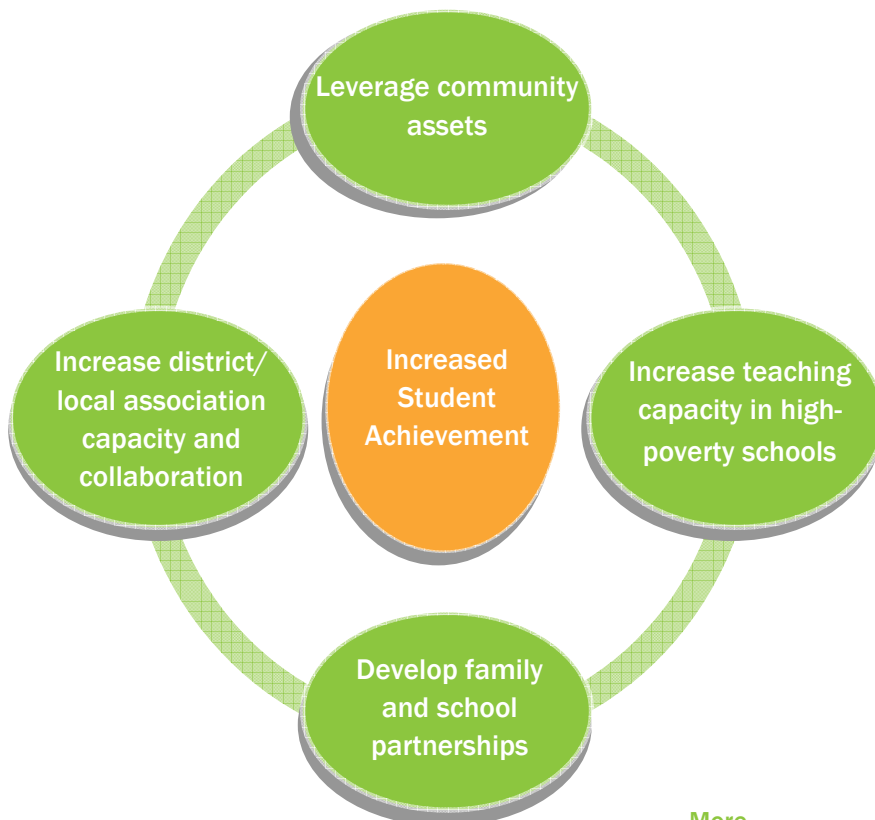
The NEA Foundation has undertaken a five-year, research-based effort to close the achievement gaps in three districts with a high number of under-achieving low income and minority students in Hamilton County (Chattanooga), Tenn.; Milwaukee, Wis.; and Seattle, Wash. Started in 2004 in Hamilton County, with Milwaukee and Seattle added in 2005 and 2006 respectively, early results from local evaluative efforts are showing significant and positive changes in teaching and learning. New sites, including Columbus, Ohio; Durham, N.C.; Kansas City, Kan., Omaha, Neb.; and Springfield, Mass., are under consideration to be added in 2010.

The NEA Foundation's work in closing achievement gaps highlights the importance of engaging not only the teachers who provide instruction, but the principals who lead buildings, the superintendent who runs the district, the families who send their children to school and the teacher association leaders who negotiate the working contract for public school employees. Together, these groups are shaping learning environments and opportunities for all students to achieve at higher levels.

Evidence-Based Theory of Change



Powerful Results



In our Milwaukee sites:

- Student achievement rates in reading and math are surpassing the district average
- High school graduation rates, now at 70 percent, are growing four times faster than the district average

In our Seattle sites:

- Student achievement rates are surpassing the state's average in reading and math
- Approximately 77 percent of students' parents are receiving home visits

In our Chattanooga sites:

- Achievement gaps are decreasing by more than half (from 23.9 percent in 2004 to 10.7 percent in 2008)
- All middle school students are achieving at higher levels



Strategic Interventions

Our theory of change and corresponding local interventions are based on recent research on effective schools, district redesign, external agent engagement, association capacity, curriculum and instruction, among other related areas. In brief, our work involves:

- **District and Local Association Capacity and Collaboration** designed to generate a shared understanding of challenges, with frequent and ongoing communication, and an agreed-upon set of strategies to address the challenges.
- **District and School Capacity and Coherence** designed to increase capacity at the district or system level to ensure school-level success. Districts need to have coherence (as defined by a singular focus on teaching and learning) and alignment of curriculum, assessments, and resources to achieve systemic reform.
- **Family and Community Partnerships** designed to generate support from businesses, nonprofits, foundations, the district, civic authorities, and parents to achieve powerful results.

Powerful Knowledge

To ensure that what we are learning can be used across all current and future sites and communicated to the field of educational improvement, the Foundation has assembled a Knowledge Advisory Group comprised of leading researchers and practitioners. Further, we have undertaken an independent and cross-site evaluation to sustain and continuously improve local efforts.

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About the NEA Foundation

The NEA Foundation is an independent public charity created in 1969 and sustained by contributions from educators, corporate sponsors, and other supporters of public education. The Foundation offers grants and programs that support educators' efforts to close the achievement gaps, increase classroom innovations, provide professional development, and salute excellence in education. For more information, visit neafoundation.org.